

WESTERN NEWS

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EPA on target to meet annual cleanup goals

The new contract system for the local Superfund cleanup is in full swing and working smoothly, Environmental Protection Agency project manager Jim Christiansen told the Lincoln County Commissioners on Wednesday.

Designed in part to increase competition and reduce prices, the system uses three contract firms bidding on blocks of around 20 residential cleanups. With some initial difficulties ironed out, the system is resulting in more predictable

employment for cleanup workers and better prices for the EPA, Christiansen said.

"We've got excellent prices compared to what we had before," he said. "Pretty drastic at times - up to 40 percent less."

About 150 properties have been cleaned of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite so far this year, Christiansen said. That number is expected to reach 170 by the time work wraps up for the year around Dec. 15.

When work starts again around the middle of February, blocks of 20 or more properties will be put out to bid and cleaned every few weeks.

About six weeks into the new federal fiscal year, Christiansen said he is still spending the last of last year's money. The local project received the \$17 million promised by EPA headquarters along with a \$4 million boost in the summer. Another \$17 million has been allocated to the new fiscal year, and

Christiansen said he expects to be able to clean another 170 or so properties with that funding. Anything additional will allow more cleanups to be completed, he said.

Headquarters seems pleased with the way things are progressing, and wage and other contract issues with the local workforce have been largely resolved, Christiansen said.

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